

Developing an Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Asset and Needs Assessment: A Guide to the Process

Purpose: An important component of the ECCS system-building process is the identification of unmet or inadequately met needs and existing assets or resources. This guide is designed to assist the ECCS grantees explore some of the critical issues related to such an assessment.

While some additional data collection may be needed to complete this process, it is likely that there are reports and other materials available that may provide answers to many of your assessment questions. ECCS planning group participants may be aware of these documents and/or may have important information about needs and assets garnered from their experience in the early childhood field.

It is important to be selective about the information you seek, focusing on the issues that you plan to address. The goal is to identify the areas that are going well, to examine present challenges and then to determine the concrete steps the planning group can take to strengthen the effectiveness and comprehensiveness of the early childhood system.

Key Questions for Each of the Critical Issues: To examine critical ECCS issues through assets and needs assessment, it is useful to focus on the following questions:

- What are we doing in this area?
- What is working well about it? How do we know this (i.e. do we have performance measures, evaluations, customer feedback)?
- What are the challenges? (E.g., a need for more extensive geographic coverage, a need for the involvement of additional agencies or organizations, better evidence of the effectiveness of current activity, a need to combine funding streams to encourage the integration of services, improved mechanisms to reach special population groups?)

Focus Area	Critical Issues Related to Developing a Comprehensive Early Childhood System
The System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there a coordinating body on the state-level that addresses cross-agency, cross-organizational issues? • Are there coordinating bodies at the local-level that address cross-agency or cross-organizational issues? • Are there efforts to ensure that early childhood issues have a high profile on the public policy agenda? • Are family members encouraged to be active participants in every component of service delivery, both at the individual level (i.e., Are family members involved in determining and participating in services for their child and family?) and the policy level (i.e., Are family members encouraged to advise and participate in the development and monitoring of policies, procedures, and practices?)? • Are there efforts to ensure that business, faith-based organizations, and State and local foundations recognize the importance of early childhood issues and are engaged in supporting early childhood systems-building? • Are there effective mechanisms for local-level administrators and service providers to provide feedback to State agencies? • Are there effective mechanisms for front-line staff to provide feedback to administrators? • What is being done to ensure that all areas of the early childhood system are encouraged or required to collect useful information on the results that are being achieved through programs or interventions? • What is being done to ensure that the early childhood system utilizes information on evidence-based practice to develop new approaches and discontinue ineffective approaches?
Medical Home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is being done to encourage medical providers to conduct regular comprehensive developmental assessments? • What is being done to ensure that the State Medicaid system recognizes developmental assessment as a critical component of the well-child visit and reimburses providers for the service? • What is being done to ensure that medical providers are able to provide appropriate referrals if a developmental screening test reveals areas of concern? • What is being done to ensure that once a referral is made information about the results of the referral are shared and the relevant providers and family members are involved in making follow-up decisions? • What is being done to ensure that children and parents have access to health insurance? • What is being done to ensure that children are connected to a medical home? • What is being done to reduce unnecessary turnover in health insurance status so families and children are not losing coverage?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is being done to ensure that medical providers know how to access the early intervention system? • What is being done to ensure that medical providers provide information about the importance of a safe, high-quality child care environment? • What is being done to ensure that medical providers explore mental health issues with family members? • What is being done to encourage care coordination and communication between other early childhood providers (e.g., home visitors, early intervention specialists, WIC, child care) and medical providers.
Mental Health/Social and Emotional Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is being done to ensure that ensure that public health nurses, early intervention specialists, home visitors, child care providers and early child care educators are trained in promoting mental health and positive social and emotional development? • What is being done to ensure that parents understand how to promote mental health and positive social and emotional development? • What is being done to ensure that parents with mental health and/or substance abuse issues receive the supports they need to address their own health issues along with parenting issues? • What is being done to ensure that early intervention specialists, home visitors, child care providers, and others know how to suggest appropriate referrals when they identify potential mental health or substance abuse issues among family members of the children they serve? • What is being done to ensure that early intervention specialists, home visitors, child care providers, early childhood educators and others have access to support when dealing with a child with developmental, behavioral, or family crisis issues? • What is being done to encourage care coordination among providers (early intervention specialists, home visitors, child care providers, and others) who are working to ensure the social emotional health of the child?
Child Care/Early Childhood Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is being done to encourage quality improvement among child care providers in the subsidized child care system? • What is being done to encourage providers of family day care or relative care to provide high quality care? • What is being done to develop or strengthen a network of child care health consultants? • What is being done to strengthen health and safety regulations for child care providers? • What is being done to train child care health consultants in handling mental health and/or behavioral issues? • What is being done to ensure that childcare providers know how and when to make referrals into the early intervention system? • What is being done to ensure that the early intervention system collaborates with childcare providers to ensure the provision of appropriate care for children receiving early intervention?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is being done to ensure that children with special needs are included in appropriate childcare settings? • What is being done to ensure that child care serves as an access point for health insurance and medical homes?
Family Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is being done to ensure that access to economic assistance (i.e., TANF, Food Stamps, WIC, Energy Assistance, Child care Assistance, Housing Assistance) is provided in an efficient and effective manner, including the use of joint applications whenever possible? • What is being done to ensure that families who have contact with the child protection system receive the services and attention they need to achieve positive outcomes? • What is being done to ensure that the child protection system and other early childhood systems work together to assist children and families? • What is being done to ensure that at-risk pregnant women receive support as early as possible in their pregnancies? • What is being done to ensure that families who seek information or services are able to obtain it with a minimum of difficulty?
Parenting Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is being done to ensure that parents and families are educated about promoting positive cognitive, social and emotional development for children? • What is being done to create parenting education programs that are family-led and enable caretakers to become effective advocates for their children? • What is being done to ensure that parents know where to go when they need assistance or information about parenting challenges? • What is being done to ensure that parents and families feel comfortable and are able to ask questions of health care providers, child care providers, early intervention specialists and others who are involved in the lives of their children? • What is being done to ensure that parenting education programs are culturally sensitive and appropriate? • What is being done to ensure that parenting education reaches all those who are responsible for caring for children including grandparents and fathers?